

CHAPTER 2 **Vision and Guiding Principles**



Introduction

The County of San Diego's General Plan sets a direction for the future of the unincorporated area of the County of San Diego by providing clear, unified framework for community development and conservation. The development of this General Plan began in 1998 and included extensive community involvement the results of which informed the creation of the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles. The Vision Statement and Guiding Principles in turn establish the foundation upon which the General Plan elements and its components are consistent, related, and measured. The Vision represents the basis by which all updated plan goals, policies, and implementation programs are measured.

Vision

The Vision recognizes the strategic initiatives of the County's General Management System (GMS), which include:

- Kids—Improve opportunities for children
- The Environment—Manage resources to ensure environmental preservation, quality of life and economic development
- Safe and Livable Communities—Promote safe and livable communities



The General Plan provides a key vehicle for the County to implement these strategic initiatives by identifying innovative growth solutions that address a full spectrum of issues, including housing, transportation, community infrastructure, and environmental impact. The County of San Diego is committed to improving opportunities and outcomes for children by providing a healthy and safe physical environment, while supporting recreational opportunities and land use patterns that encourage a healthy lifestyle. This General Plan guides the County's management of its environmental resources through policies to sustain and enhance the land, water, air, and biodiversity upon which all life depends, while recognizing that our growing population must also be accommodated. While the General Plan's goals and policies address the County of San Diego's natural hazards and human activities that pose a threat to public safety, promoting livable communities requires much more than just safety. Livable communities also require the environment and the amenities necessary for people to prosper and maintain a shared sense of civic pride.

Who We Are

The County of San Diego is a group of rural communities offering residents places to live, work, shop, be educated, and recreate in a setting dominated by its natural environment and open spaces. It is a low-density alternative to the urbanized San Diego coastline and inland areas, with many of us living in small scale villages or on large lots with agriculture and open space. Our villages are compact to minimize intrusion into agricultural lands and open spaces; the distance that we travel to our local services and businesses; and the need for extensive infrastructure and services; while also inducing community association, activity, and walking. The County's ambience is quiet and peaceful, with nighttime skies illuminated by the stars. Our infrastructure and services are characteristic of rural places with natural water courses, septic systems, low-level street lighting, and limited sidewalks. Buildings and architecture are subsumed within and complement our physical setting of valleys, hillsides, and deserts.



Our Physical Setting

We recognize the importance of the San Diego region's natural environment and are committed to sustaining its diversity, health, and integrity as a distinguishing asset for residents and visitors. Development shall respect and maintain the physical and visual integrity of the hillsides, valleys, and deserts that shape and provide identity for our community. We will avoid or minimize developing in areas susceptible to geologic, wildfire, and flooding risks. We will retain and protect the viability of our woodlands, riparian corridors, and important plant and animal habitats, maintaining the health and viability of declining species. Our lakes and streams will be free of toxics and harmful pollutants, sustaining fish populations and a healthy water supply, while offering abundant recreation opportunities for residents and visitors. We recognize and shall maintain strong partnerships with state and federal agencies in protecting and preserving our natural environment.





Protecting Our Agriculture

We value our agricultural lands and recognize the importance of preserving opportunities for the production of healthy food for our population and others. We will emphasize the distribution of our agricultural products locally and within the region. Our development patterns and parcel sizes will avoid incentivizing the conversion of agriculture for urban uses.



Our Communities

The County of San Diego provides a diversity of choices for the type and character of community in which we live. Some of us live in villages that contain a mix of housing types that are affordable to our population and are located near retail businesses, employment, schools, parklands, churches, and public institutions. Our villages vary in density and character, some near and transitioning with coastal suburban communities, while others reflect the unique character of their mountain, valley, and desert setting. Others of us live on large parcels, separated from our neighbors by agriculture and open spaces with few or no urban services.

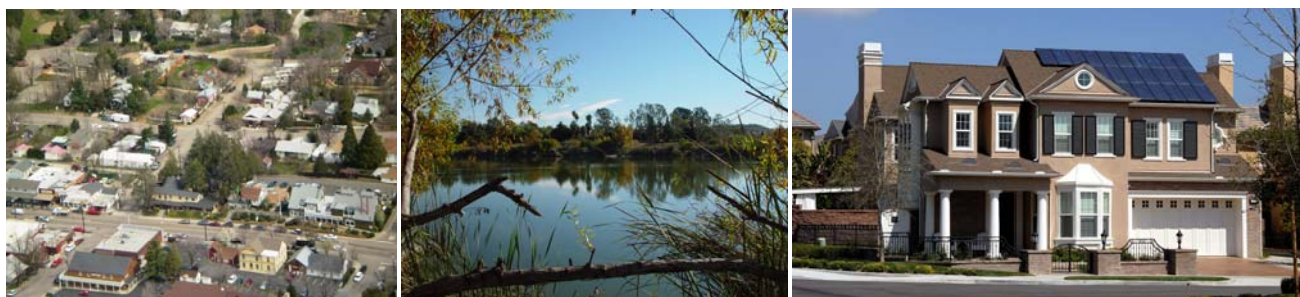
How We Get Around

The County of San Diego provides infrastructure offering easy and convenient access within and between our communities and to the greater region. Our streets and highways are connected, complete, and maintained to support use by our automobiles and trucks. Our road network channels traffic to avoid conflicts with our residential neighborhoods. Our traffic signalization and traffic control mechanisms facilitate traffic flow and avoid congestion. As an alternative to the automobile, bicycle paths and pedestrian-ways are strategically located within and around village areas and designed to provide a pleasant experience for users. We explore opportunities to expand transit services commensurate with needs and density. Our village cores contain shared parking facilities that enable residents and visitors to park once, walk along lively streets, and patronize multiple business establishments and community services.



How We Sustain Our Community

The County of San Diego recognizes its long-term obligations to future residents by simultaneously promoting ecological health, economic vitality, and social well-being. In our villages, we provide a mix and density of land uses that minimize automobile trips and their length, invigorate the economic health of our businesses, and promote association with our neighbors. These, coupled with increased access to transit, reduce our air emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, energy consumption, noise, and time spent away from our families. We walk more in our village cores and participate in recreational activities, improving the health of our families and children. We develop our properties and design our buildings to reduce energy consumption, use alternative energy sources, capture stormwater and recycle wastewater, use recycled construction materials, reuse our solid wastes, and use non-toxic paints and materials. Our sustainable practices contribute to a healthy environment, enhancing the livability of San Diego County.



Our Sustainable and Vital Economy

We maintain a healthy and vital economy, providing a variety of jobs for our residents and a climate in which our businesses can prosper. Our businesses are diverse, building on the resources uniquely available in the County, including its agriculture and natural setting that offers opportunities for tourism and, at the same time, providing goods and services to our residents. By providing our residents with housing in compact villages, we provide a strong customer base to maintain the viability of our businesses.

Our Safe Community

We value the safety of our community. Our neighborhoods are safe places to live and we are comfortable in our business districts, parks, and open spaces with almost non-existent crime. While we value and enjoy the beauty of our outdoors and environment, we recognize the inherent risks of wildfires, flooding, earthquakes, and other natural hazards and take measures to locate and design our development to avoid these risks and provide excellent and responsive police and fire services to protect our well-being.

Guiding Principles

The Guiding Principles constitute a set of rules by which updated General Plan policies were developed. They guide the formulation of growth and development plans, environmental conservation, provision of



infrastructure and services, and protection from environmental and man-induced hazards. The General Plan maps, goals and policies, and implementation programs are based on a set of ten interrelated principles that provide guidance for accommodating future growth while retaining or enhancing the County's rural character, its economy, its environmental resources, and its unique communities. The ten Guiding Principles are:

1. Support a reasonable share of projected regional population growth.
2. Promote sustainability by locating new development near existing infrastructure, services, and jobs.
3. Reinforce the vitality, local economy, and individual character of existing communities while balancing housing, employment, and recreational opportunities.
4. Promote environmental stewardship that protects the range of natural resources and habitats that uniquely define the County's character and ecological importance.
5. Ensure that development accounts for physical constraints and the natural hazards of the land.
6. Provide and support a multi-modal transportation network that enhances connectivity and supports community development patterns.
7. Maintain environmentally sustainable communities and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.
8. Preserve agriculture as an integral component of the region's economy, character, and open space network.
9. Minimize public costs of infrastructure and services and correlate their timing with new development.
10. Recognize community and stakeholder interests while striving for consensus.

In summary, the Guiding Principles provide for the development of land uses, investment in infrastructure and public services, and conservation of natural resources that enable the County's residents and businesses to enjoy a more sustainable environment, economy, and well-being and health. Each of the guiding principles is outlined in more detail below.

Guiding Principle 1

Support a reasonable share of projected regional population growth.

California and the San Diego region have been among the fastest growing areas in the nation and projections indicate that this will continue during the upcoming decades, regardless of variations associated with economic cycles. Data indicates that much of the growth has been and will continue to be attributable to birth rates of existing residents coupled with the longer lives of the population and, secondarily, due to immigration. The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) projects that the entire County's population will increase by 40 percent between 2000 and 2030, or approximately 1,140,000 persons. Though considerable growth in the region is likely to gravitate toward existing urbanized areas to facilitate access to jobs and services and reduce vehicle commutes and gasoline consumption, demand for development in unincorporated County areas is anticipated to continue as available lands within urbanized areas diminish and residents choose to live in a rural environment.

As growth continues in the region, a reasonable share will be accommodated in the unincorporated County provided that it sustains the natural setting, characteristics, and qualities that distinguish the County, its communities, and rural places as special places to live. Over time it is likely that an increasing share of regional growth will choose to live in urban areas, close to jobs and transit, with corresponding decreases in the unincorporated County areas.

Guiding Principle 2

Promote sustainability by locating new development near existing infrastructure, services, and jobs.

Low-density, large-parcel development patterns in the County afford residents the opportunity to enjoy open spaces, natural areas, and a rural lifestyle. The greater the fragmentation and dispersal of development, however, can result in corresponding increases in impacts on environmental resources and the costs of community infrastructure and services. The complexity and cost of the network of highways, water pipes, electrical energy, and other utility infrastructure needed to serve development is a function of the distance from supply source to the user. The greater the dispersal of development, the greater the improvements and associated costs required for the user and community. Similarly, community services such as police and fire are provided from central locations and require travel times to access users, which increase with decreasing densities. Low-density and fragmented development patterns also increase travel distances and times from homes to jobs, shopping, and services. These, in turn, increase gasoline consumption, air pollution, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and, often, time away from home and the family.

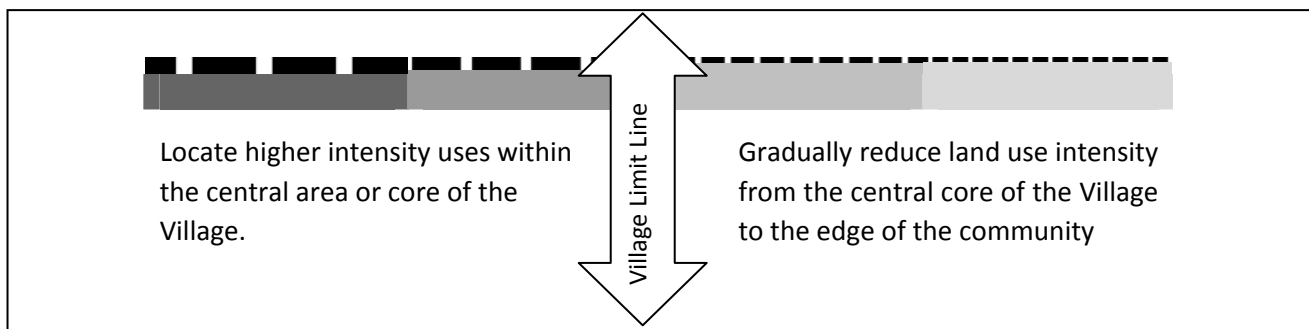
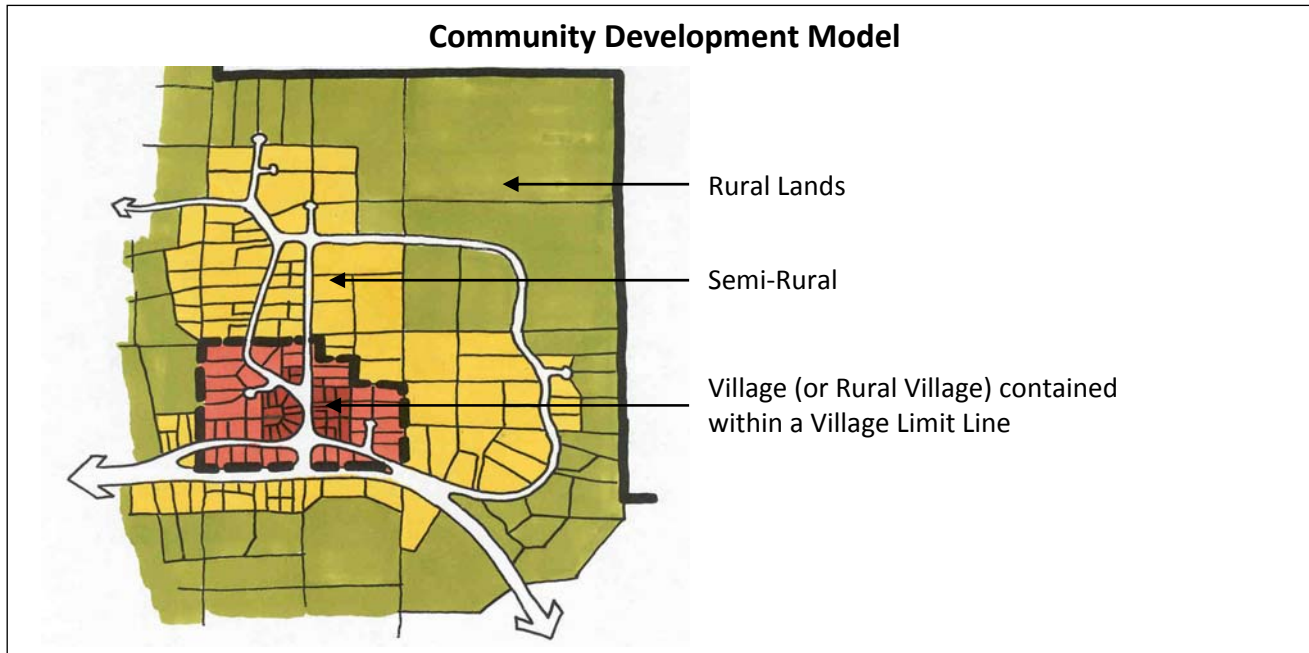
Large-parcel development also contributes to the loss of agriculture and habitat. Research for the Multi-Species Conservation Program (MSCP) indicates that there has been a considerable loss of habitat in San Diego region over the past several decades, with some habitats occupying less than 10 percent of their historic range.

As population growth continues in the San Diego County, more compact development should occur within existing communities to reduce these impacts. Locating housing closer to retail, services, schools, and jobs and on smaller lots within communities can reduce the size of required infrastructure improvements and number and length of automobile trips, while increase the efficiency of delivering police, fire, and other public services and enhancing community livability. A more compact form of development in the County would reduce the amount of developed land, or its “footprint,” increasing the amount of open space, natural habitat, and agriculture that can be preserved, as well as reduce pressure on groundwater resources. It also would contribute to the retention of the rural setting and lifestyle of backcountry communities.

A model of compact development begins with a central core, referred to as a “Village” or, in very rural communities, a “Rural Village” in which the highest intensities of development are located and surrounded by areas of lesser intensity including “Semi-Rural” and “Rural Lands.” The edge of a “Village” or “Rural Village” would be defined by a “limit line” that can be used to differentiate permitted development densities and design standards. The “Village” would contain the densest neighborhoods and a broad range of commercial and civic uses that are supported by a dense network of local roads containing bicycle lanes and walkways linking the neighborhoods with parks, schools, and public areas. Outside of the “Village,” “Semi-



Rural” areas would contain low-density residential neighborhoods, small-scale agricultural operations, and rural commercial businesses. In turn, these would be surrounded by very low-density residential areas that contain open space, habitat, recreation, agriculture, and other uses associated with rural areas. The diagrams below illustrate these relationships:



Development of compact communities is predicated on the clustering of uses and density. As practiced, the strict correlation of parcel size with density may be contrary to these objectives. The clustering of housing units adjacent to one another on one-acre lots, for example, may contribute to a compact community while their dispersal over their sites does not.

Developing the County’s communities more compactly meets critical objectives for compliance with the mandates of AB 32, the *California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006*.



Julian’s compact development patterns with a small central core surrounded by semi-rural and rural development

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The bill requires the reduction of GHG emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, about a 25 percent reduction from current levels. Governor Schwarzenegger's Executive Order S-E-05 requires further reductions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. As automobile use and energy consumption are principal contributors to GHG emissions, compact land use patterns and development practices that reduce trip generation and distances will be essential.

Guiding Principle 3

Reinforce the vitality, local economy, and individual character of existing communities while balancing housing, employment, and recreational opportunities.

Critically important in defining the San Diego region is the diversity and character of its distinct communities. Some are located at the edges and serve as transitions from coastal and inland urbanized cities to agriculture and open spaces. Others are remotely located in agricultural, pine-covered mountain, valley, and desert locations. Each has emerged in a distinct physical setting with a unique history, culture, character, life style, and identity that has attracted residents and, in some cases, tourists.

As the County continues to grow, it is critical that development be located, scaled, and designed to retain and enhance the qualities that distinguish its communities. Development planning must consider uses; parcel sizes; building form, scale, massing, and architecture; landscapes; and site development practices that are comparable to, or transition with, existing development to ensure that new development “fits” with the community. Smaller parcel sizes in community cores, for example, can be developed to replicate the character and scale of existing development.



Main street in Fallbrook

With new development, it is also crucial to accommodate important missing uses that residents indicate are needed to “complete” the community. These may include locally-needed retail and services and/or amenities, such as parks, sidewalks that are pedestrian-friendly, and parking facilities.

Guiding Principle 4

Promote environmental stewardship that protects the range of natural resources and habitats that uniquely define the County's character and ecological importance.

The San Diego region is considered to be one of the most important biological areas in the United States, and one of the most biologically diverse areas of the world¹. It is home to more rare and endangered species than any other region in the continental United States. Development practices during recent decades have

¹ Dobson, A.P., J.P. Rodriguez, W.M. Roberts, and D.S. Wilcove. 1997 Geographic Distribution of Endangered Species in the United States. *Science* 275(5299): 550-553



degraded these resources, with some habitat types occupying less than five to ten percent of their historic ranges. The continued existence of over 400 sensitive plant and animal species depends on the assurance that sufficient amounts of native habitat, wildlife corridors, and habitat linkages are preserved and managed in a viable manner. The County, in cooperation with SANDAG and state and federal agencies, has been aggressive in documenting and developing policies for the protection of sensitive species and habitats. The MSCP provides the foundation for these efforts.

As growth and new development occur in the County, critical lands and habitat should be set aside and protected from development. On other lands, buildings, infrastructure, and other improvements should be located and designed to prevent degradation and adverse impacts on adjoining resources. The maintenance of viable and healthy habitats and biological resources sustain, not only sensitive plant and animal species, but contribute to the economic value, character, and identity of the County.



Guiding Principle 5

Ensure that development accounts for physical constraints and the natural hazards of the land.

Residents, businesses, and visitors to the San Diego region are exposed to a diversity of natural and human-induced hazards that could affect life and property. Rupture of the Elsinore, Earthquake Valley, and San Jacinto Faults, and other ancillary faults, may incur property and personal damage due to ground shaking, landslides, liquefaction, and tsunamis. Landslides and rockfalls occur throughout the County's mountainous terrain. Hillside canyons, valleys, the desert floor, and flatlands may be impacted by heavy storm runoff and flooding. Wildland fires often occur in grasslands, chaparrals, and forests, while threatening structures in urbanized areas. Some industrial and commercial businesses involve the use of toxic chemicals and hazardous materials that pose a risk to human health.



New development should be located and designed to protect life and property from these and similar hazards. In high risk areas, development should be prohibited or restricted in type and/or density. In other areas, structures, properties, infrastructure, and other improvements should be designed to mitigate potential risks.

Guiding Principle 6

Provide and support a multi-modal transportation network that enhances connectivity and supports community development patterns.

The transportation system within the unincorporated County will rely primarily on a public road network that contains transportation routes for vehicular and non-vehicular travel. Future development will be more compact, which will reduce travel distances and the geographic extent of the transportation network, as discussed in Guiding Principle 2. However, the mix and densities of land uses in the rural setting will be insufficient to support the development of a comprehensive public transportation system accessible to a significant number of residents and the automobile will remain the primary mode of transportation.

An effective transportation system should provide convenient access to employment, education, public service, commercial, and recreational centers. It should provide connectivity within each community and within the region. The capacity of the transportation network should be adequate to support the development capacity of the land use plan for housing, retail, industrial, recreational, and other uses. Routes should be developed that minimize construction and environmental costs.

The transportation network should be built to support and correlate with community development patterns. Where more compact forms of development occur, a dense transportation network should be developed that provides a unified and connected system of public roads that accommodate private vehicles, bus or transit stops, pedestrian routes, and bicycles. In low-intensity rural areas, transportation routes should provide safe connections within the community, as well as connections to the regional transportation network. Bicycle routes should be integrated into the road network.



Guiding Principle 7

Maintain environmentally sustainable communities and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.

There is a growing body of evidence that our built communities and cultures are resulting in over-consumption and degradation of natural resources and that a major shift in human behavior and development practices are necessary to overcome these. Increasingly, communities are seeking more sustainable approaches to development and conservation where persons and societies can live within the means of what the Earth can provide over the long term. A generally accepted definition states “sustainability meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to



meet their own needs.”² The emission of GHGs is one critical issue among many that cumulatively contribute to a community’s and a region’s sustainability.

Sustainability principles also recognize the need to balance the environment with economic and social equity needs. A sustainable economy is one in which good jobs are available for residents and businesses thrive, providing capital to support human needs and protect the environment. A sustainable society is one in which residents are well-educated, have access to culture, are physically active and healthy, and participate with their neighbors in community activity. Together, these are referred to as the “triple bottom line” of sustainability and all are considered of equal importance.

The County of San Diego can move towards sustainability and a reduction of GHG emissions by how it manages land development and building construction, conserves habitats and natural resources, provides efficient transportation and mobility systems, and develops its infrastructure and public services. As described for Guiding Principle 2, land uses should be developed more compactly resulting in reduced automobile use and increased use of public transit, walking, and bicycling. This will consume less gasoline, generate less air pollution and GHG emissions, preserve greater amounts of habitat and agricultural lands, and improve the lifestyles and health of community residents. Locating residents closer to retail stores and jobs also increases their economic viability. Providing new recreational facilities and access to the County’s abundant open spaces can improve public health. Similarly, choices for alternative transportation modes including bus and transit systems, pedestrian routes, and bicycle paths should be expanded, as described in Guiding Principle 6, and would result in similar benefits to public health.

Sites should be planned, buildings designed, and infrastructure developed to reduce the consumption of energy, water, and raw materials; generation of waste; and use of toxic and hazardous substances. Buildings should be oriented on properties to maximize opportunities for solar access and photovoltaic energy systems. Rainfall should be captured on site, lessening runoff into storm drainage



Example of native landscaping

facilities and pollution of creeks and streams, and used for irrigation and to replenish the groundwater supply. Buildings should be designed to reduce energy consumption by incorporating natural ventilation, insulation, sunshades, use of energy-efficient equipment, and similar techniques. Wastewater should be re-used for irrigation, toilets, and other suitable purposes. Sites should be landscaped with plant materials that are drought-tolerant and require little water and fertilizer. These represent some of the diverse techniques that should be considered as growth occurs in the County.

² United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development

Guiding Principle 8

Preserve agriculture as an integral component of the region's economy, character, and open space network.

Agriculture contributes to the County's rural character and its economic output represents one-fifth of the regional economy. Unlike many agricultural areas that depend primarily on soil quality, agriculture in San Diego County relies primarily on the region's mild climate and its long growing seasons. These factors allow the County to facilitate small farms and crop diversification.

Growth and development in the County should be directed to protect opportunities for continued agricultural production. Development of compact communities, as defined by Guiding Principle 2, will contribute to this objective. Permitted densities in prime agricultural areas should be reduced to sustain sufficient parcel size for viable agricultural activities. Incentives should be provided to enable farmers to create small lot subdivisions while retaining the bulk of their land for agricultural operation. Land uses that are incompatible with agricultural uses should be prohibited from major agricultural areas. Finally, a program for the purchase of development rights for agricultural lands should be implemented.



Guiding Principle 9

Minimize public costs of infrastructure and services and correlate their timing with new development.

Population growth impacts the cost to build and operate essential public services. The development of housing, retail stores, and industrial jobs and services requires new roads, schools, parks, law enforcement, fire protection, and other public services. National studies indicate that a residential development does not pay for itself, requiring an estimated \$1.42 in public expenditures for every dollar it generates in tax revenues. In California, this deficit is even greater due to the limitations of Proposition 13. In addition, dispersed development patterns, common in unincorporated areas, are costly to serve because they require a more extensive road network for transportation and fire protection, law enforcement, and emergency services. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, for example, found that the capital costs for public infrastructure are typically 74 percent greater for low-density, semi-rural development than for high-density development.³ Although entitlement fees cover some of the initial public costs for capital improvements, they do not pay for operational or maintenance costs and property taxes do not generate sufficient revenue to fund operational costs.

³ "Development of the Urban Fringe and Beyond," Economic Research Service, USDA, June 2001. The report defines "low density" as less than 2 dwelling units per acre.



To reduce the costs of construction and maintenance, development in the County should be developed more compactly and in proximity to existing infrastructure and services. New development located near existing infrastructure and services would be served in a more efficient manner and would require less extensive roads and infrastructure, as defined by Guiding Principle 2. This could reduce the need to build and operate new road networks, emergency and law enforcement facilities, libraries, schools, parks, and other public services needed to support residential development in remote areas.

Guiding Principle 10

Recognize community and stakeholder interests while striving for consensus.

The residents of San Diego County's unincorporated communities and rural areas have chosen to live here largely due to its environmental setting of hillsides, valleys, deserts, and agriculture; low-density rural character; absence of congestion and pollution; friendliness of neighbors; and pace of life that contribute to a high quality of life distinct from the urbanized environment of coastal San Diego and adjoining inland areas. As growth continues, development must be managed to protect these assets.



A community meeting held during the General Plan Update planning process

To this end, opportunities must continue to be provided to engage the County's residents, business persons, and stakeholder interests in planning and development decisions that affect the character and quality of the communities and rural areas. Forums for citizens to voice their opinions and provide input regarding proposed land uses to be accommodated; their density, design and development character; compatibility and "fit" with existing uses; obligations to support public infrastructure and services; and impact mitigation must be continued. Where significant debates occur, processes should be established to enable each viewpoint to be heard and for compromise positions to be reached. Community groups such as the community planning and sponsor groups should continue to have an active role in these processes.